

Naturally Speaking

JEFFERSON COUNTY CONSERVATION

Volume 28, Number 1

Winter 2012

Conservation Update by Dennis Lewiston

Every year the Jefferson County Conservation Board is required to submit an annual report to the County Supervisors. In December we submitted a report that summarized all projects and activities that took place from July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2011. The following is an abbreviated version of that report. A copy of the complete report can be obtained at the office of the JCCB.



Projects Completed:

-Phase two of the Jefferson County Park campground renovation project was completed in the spring of 2011. Eight camping pads (sites 17 - 24) were equipped with 50 amp service and water hook-ups. The pads were also re-graded, leveled and re-rocked. Phase three (final phase) was completed this fall.

-The existing water line in Jefferson County Park was no longer adequate to supply all of the showers, toilets, residence and office facilities in Jefferson County Park. To remedy this situation a new 4" main was brought from Key Blvd, through the newly acquired Holmes property and connected into the existing line near the trailer dump station.

This drastically improved the water pressure and will provide future park developments with an adequate water supply.

-New permanent siding was put on the front of the shop and office building. Next year new siding will be put on the entire shop building/nature center and residence.

-Ryan Smelcher constructed a recycling center at the entrance of the campground. This was an Eagle Scout project.

-Two miles of Jefferson County Park trail was regraded and resurfaced.

-The 6 mile section of the Fairfield Loop Trail from Mint Blvd to Whitham Woods was turned over to the JCCB for management. This section of trail was then re-graded, sprayed and packed during the report period.

-A \$25,000 Fish Habitat Grant was obtained to renovate the pond at Whitham Woods. Construction will start the spring of 2012.

-The JCCB made accommodations to move the Peach Blossom School House from Round Prairie Park to North B Street in Fairfield. The building will be used as a classroom for Singing Cedars School.



Continued on page 2

Conservation Update (continued)



Two Libertyville students get up close with a box turtle at a wetland program.

During the 2010—2011 fiscal year, 4861 people took part in naturalist programs



Brynley Allison holds a brown snake.

Miscellaneous Activities:

-The JCCB was awarded the 2010 Tourism Award for Natural Resources. This statewide award was presented by the Iowa Tourism Office and The Travel Federation of Iowa.

-Applied for a \$120,000 DOT State Transportation Enhancement Grant. The money would be used to plant trees, provided parking, and install signage to the 6-mile section of the Loop Trail managed by the JCCB.

-Naturalist Therese Cumiskey continued to edit “Naturally Speaking”, the quarterly newsletter of the JCCB.

-Continued to participate in monthly radio shows on KMCD.

-Continued to update our website (jeffersoncountyconservation.com). The JCCB also has purchased the right to use MyCountyParks.com which has information on all 99 counties in the state of Iowa.

-Shawn Morrissey continued to set up and direct two hunter safety classes for Jefferson County. Classes are held every spring and fall at the Southeast Iowa Skeet Club north of Fairfield.

-Ron Meyers continued to give trail rides to the elderly and disabled, providing them with an opportunity to see trails in Jefferson County Park and on the Fairfield Loop Trail.

-Continued to have a special deer hunt in Jefferson County Park. Ten deer were harvested during the fall of 2010. Approximately 65 does have

been harvested in the four years that the hunt has been implemented.

Environmental Education:

During the 2010 - 2011 fiscal year 191 groups, approximately 4861 individuals took part in naturalist programs. This compares with 164 groups, 3874 individuals in 2009 – 2010, and 153 groups, 3310 individuals in 2008 – 2009.

Park Usage and Revenue:

The JCCB parks continued to be very busy throughout the year. During the report period Jefferson County Park collected \$27,154 in camping fees, Round Prairie Park \$2,383 and Mac Coon Access \$4,068. Shelter fees collected totaled \$2,705 (138 reservations) and cabin fees totaled \$11,460 (67 reservations). All user fees are used to upgrade facilities when needed and help defray utility costs.

Thanks to the County Supervisors, the five-member conservation board, staff members and the citizens of Jefferson County for supporting the Jefferson County Conservation Board so it can continue to provide quality outdoor recreational opportunities for the public to enjoy.



Park & Trail Update by Bob Leazer

It's time for an update on park news. We've had a pretty good fall, weather has been exceptionally good to us so far. Phase 3 of our campground upgrade has been completed. All of our campsites now have 50 amp electrical capabilities for those campers that need it, as well as water hookups. Should be a nice improvement for the modern campers. We will have to do some work to the sites come early spring to ready them for the summer camping season, such as reseeding of grass and graveling and leveling the camp pads. Hopefully Mother Nature will give us the perfect spring in order to accomplish this.

Those of you familiar with Whitham Woods can look to see some additional improvements there also. JCCB will be receiving a grant to refurbish the pond in the park to improve fish habitat. We will be giving the entrance to the park a facelift as well by clearing the fence row and installing new fencing. There is also a new pit latrine by the parking lot for park users and trail hikers. A new informational kiosk has been added and one of the panels has tree identification info in it, as part of an eagle scout project completed by Mitchell Burnstedt. Mitchell also installed posts with plaques on them identifying various trees and shrubs and he added a fishing line recycling tube near the pond to help prevent wildlife from becoming entangled in discarded fishing line. You will also notice kestrel nesting boxes in trees as part of his project. The JCCB would like to extend our thanks to the Manning

Family Memorial donation, as we will be using some of their donation to help fund Mitchell's scout project.

As you hike or bike the loop trail you will notice some new tree and shrub plantings on the section of the trail north from the Cedar View Trail bridge to old Hwy 34. This was done in conjunction with "Trees Forever" to add some enhancement to that section of the trail. JCCB would like to thank all the volunteers that helped make the tree planting project a success.

In other news I would like to extend a word of praise to Ron Meyers, our park host, for once again organizing our end of the season campground potluck. What unfolds at the small shelter in the campground is nothing short of amazing. Campers are all invited to bring a dish to the shelter and enjoy some of the best food prepared in the world! This year was great. We had somewhere in the range of 15 to 20 Dutch oven delights plus several other outstanding dishes. Not to mention triple chocolate delight over ice cream!!!! WOW!! Next year I will be wearing my sweatpants to the event as I could barely waddle back to my camper. Thanks Ron and Jeri and all who participated in making it a great season's end in the campground.

With that said, hope to see you all next spring in the park and on the trails. Hope you have a great 2012.
Bob



Tree planting volunteers.



New pit latrines have been completed at Whitham Woods, Lamson Woods and at the intersection of Cedar View Trail and the Loop Trail.

Park Management News by Shawn Morrissey



Fishing platform overlooking Whitham Woods pond.

Whitham Woods, located one mile west of Fairfield on Highway 34, is the original site of the C.W. Whitham Nursery.



Decaying spillway.

This spring, weather permitting, a pond renovation project will begin at Whitham Woods on the west edge of Fairfield. The pond has been a popular fishing spot for many years. In the last few years the condition of the pond has gone down hill. The main problem with the pond is its lack of depth. Over the 50 plus years that the pond has been in place, silt and leaves and other debris have accumulated at the bottom resulting in a pond that has an average depth of about 4 feet. This is not a healthy depth for fish to survive in.

After looking at the pond with a local pond designer and talking with the fisheries biologists it was decided that, to improve the health of the pond, a major renovation would be necessary. This renovation may take several months to complete and it is the type of project where a big mess must be made to end up with a nice finished product.

The first step in the process will be to cut a hole in the dam and allow the pond to drain and dry out. The two failing outlet pipes will also be removed along with the trees and brush that have grown up on the dam. Once

the pond basin has dried out the sediment will be removed and the dam will be rebuilt. The new dam will be higher and a new outlet pipe will be installed. The result will be a pond with average depths 4 to 5 feet deeper than the existing water level and some areas as deep as 10 to 14 feet. This will allow for a healthier condition for fish to survive in throughout the year.

Fish habitat will be enhanced by placing several habitat structures, as recommended by the District Fishery Biologist. Structural enhancements include cedar tree bundles, old cement culverts, catfish boxes, large-mouth bass spawning structures, as well as placement of rock and sand for spawning areas. Clearing around the pond and on the dam will improve accessibility for the shoreline angler. Once the renovation is complete the pond will be restocked and a quality fishery should return.

This project will be largely funded by a fish habitat grant. Money for fish habitat grants comes from fishing license fees. So thanks to the anglers for funding this project.



Great Backyard Bird Count

February 17-20, 2012

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers across the country in counting birds. The information gathered helps researchers learn more about how birds are doing. Anyone can participate and it takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. To learn how you can participate visit the official website at www.birdcount.org. Or consider joining us on our bird count on February 20th (see page 5).



Upcoming Programs



Wild Edibles

Saturday, May 19, 9:00 a.m. - Noon

Mike Krebill, vice president of the Prairie States Mushroom Club and a member in the National Wild Foods Association Hall of Fame, will take participants on a fascinating, mouth-watering exploration of Jefferson County Park. This workshop will involve identification of spring edibles and mushrooms, plant preparation, and sampling of wild foods, including some delicious dandelion dishes. **PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED.** Limited to 30 participants.

Fee: \$10 per person. \$20/family. For those interested Mike will have wild plant reference books for sale at a discount. To reserve your spot e-mail therese@jeffersoncountyconservation.com or call 472-4421. Meets at the Jefferson County Park nature center.

For The Birds! The following bird watching opportunities are co-sponsored by Jefferson County Conservation and Southeast Iowa Audubon Society and will be led by Diane Porter.

Eagle Watch

Saturday February 4th, 9:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Pack your lunch and grab your binoculars! We'll meet at the Jefferson County Park nature center at 9:30 a.m. We'll load up the vans and head south to watch Eagles along the Des Moines River. Space is limited. Pre-registration is required. Fee: \$3.00

Great Backyard Bird Count

Monday February 20th.
Meet at the Jefferson County Park nature center parking lot at 9:30 a.m. From there we'll carpool to Diane Porter's property to count birds from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. as part of the Great Backyard Bird Count.



Waterfowl Watch

Sunday, March 11th 1:30 p.m.
Mid march is a great time to watch migrating ducks and geese. Currently we are finalizing our location, so as the day approaches check out the "what's new" page on our website (jeffersoncountyconservation.com) for more details.



Pelican Watch

Tuesday, April 10th.
Pelicans stop only for a brief time at our wetlands and it's usually during the second week of April. We'll cross our fingers and hope they've arrived...or that we haven't missed them! Meet at the trailhead of Cedar View Trail at 7:30 a.m. Wear boots. Participants can

expect to walk up to two miles.



Warbler Walk

Saturday, May 12th. 7:00 a.m.
The first two weeks in May are peak migration time for warblers. We'll meet at 7:00 a.m. at Ely

Ford in Lacey Keosauqua State Park, one of the best warbler birding sites in southeast Iowa. Yes, I know that's early BUT it will be well worth it if you see even one warbler in its spring plumage.

Backroads Birding

Saturday, May 26th.
We'll meet at 7:30 a.m. at Jefferson County Park and head out along the back roads of Jefferson County and Van Buren County to find those birds of pasture and fence row (like the bobolink below). Space is limited. Pre-registration is required. Fee: \$3:00.



Around the County & Through the Parks by Ron Meyers



Cross country ski tracks along the north trail in Jefferson County Park.



Rabbit tracks in the snow.

This is the winter edition of Naturally Speaking but before we move into winter we need to recap the fall.

And what a great fall it was! I thought that the colors were as pretty as they had been in a long time and they seemed to last longer too. I hope that everyone got to be out and enjoy the colors and the nice fall weather.

Our annual Fall Drive Through was another success. We had a great fall day and a different route that included the opportunity to stop and tour the Maasdam Barns and Visitor Center. We appreciated the Maasdam Barn Committee making these great facilities available. I'm sure the barns were one of the reasons that approximately 400 people took the opportunity to come out for this drive.

We get a lot of thanks for offering this drive through. We only make a short section of the trail system open to vehicular traffic one day a year and people really seem to appreciate it. It was nice to see that the majority of the vehicles were driven by regular trail users who were bringing relatives, friends and neighbors, many of whom were unable to otherwise use them, to see the many sites that only the trails provide.

Over all we had another good picnicking and camping season. The shelters were busy including about ten weddings at the gazebo. The cabins had their best year ever and the campground did very well, too.

This transition time from fall to winter

has really been an enjoyable time for me. In fact I think that November is beating out October now as my favorite month of the year. A couple of reasons for this change are that November falls between two major events for me. October brings an end to my park hosting duties and although I love living and working in the park, after six months of "enjoying" the park and the job, enjoying and getting along with most of the people most of the time and being frustrated by some of the people some of the time I look forward to the peacefulness of the park without the campground, cabins and shelters for awhile.

Again, I love my job and I'll be as excited to get back to it in the spring as the campers and the picnickers will be, but after 6 months I'm happy for November when the park is quiet and it too is transitioning into its winter mode. I can sleep in and don't have to worry about enforcing rules for awhile! The other half of why I like November is that it gives me time to get ready to head south in December for the winter if I want to.

Now on to winter! As always the seasons change and here it is winter time again. You can still get out and enjoy your Jefferson County Parks during the winter and in some ways it's a more interesting time to do it.

The parks are no longer hidden by all the leaves and tall grasses so it's easier to see the wildlife and the lay of the land. Don't let old man winter keep you indoors. It's another great time to

really see the parks and they all have a trail waiting for you, so get out, get your exercise and see what they have to offer.

Jefferson County Park and the Cedar View Trail, close to Fairfield, with lots of trails and access to them, truly something for everyone.

Whitham Woods. Woods, yes (over a hundred tree species) but some nice trails and history too, also close to Fairfield;

Zillman's Hickory Hills. Hickory Trees and hills for sure but also a nice prairie restoration area and a Pine tree plantation. The trails let you see it all plus a small Pioneer Cemetery. It's only about 3 miles southeast of Fairfield off Glasgow Road.;

Round Prairie Park is a little further away from Fairfield, about 12 miles but it's worth the drive. It features a real nice mature Oak/Hickory Timber, several acres of restored prairie, evi-

dence of an old stone quarry and Cedar Creek borders the south end of the park. Its trails are limited but it's a great place to traverse and make your own trail;

Mac Coon Access is also a little further away, about 5 miles north of Lockridge along the Skunk River. The river is the main view here but there is also a nice primitive trail through the woods above the campground.

Winter would be a great time to see these areas in their "undressed" version. Other areas that you might want to explore include Cedar Creek Timber and Wetland, Livingston Timber, Turkey Run Wildlife Area and Gantz-Hewett Timber. These areas don't have much in the way of trails but you can make your own. However these areas are all Public Hunting Areas so you would want to stay away during all hunting seasons. For more information and directions get a copy of JCCB's Parks and Wildlife Areas Directory.



Snow covered swinging bridge.



Learn to Build Your Own Bow

The ancient skill of building bows from one piece of wood is an art form and this spring we are bringing back master bow maker Gene Winter, owner of Winter Bow Shoppe in Waterloo, for a two-day workshop. The workshop runs from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, May 5 & 6, 2012.

Because of the time involved in making a selfbow and the one-on-one instruction required, this program is LIMITED TO 6 PARTICIPANTS.



There is a \$200.00 fee per student. The osage orange staves and everything needed for the class will be provided.

Call 472-4421 or e-mail therese@jeffersoncountyconservation.com to reserve your space



Gene Winter



MISSION STATEMENT: Our mission is to enhance the quality of life in Jefferson County by acquiring, developing and managing public areas so that its citizens will have opportunities for quality outdoor recreation experiences, and to cultivate good land stewardship through natural history and environmental education activities.

JEFFERSON COUNTY CONSERVATION WWW.JEFFERSONCOUNTYCONSERVATION.COM

JCCB Staff

Dennis Lewiston, Director
 Shawn Morrissey,
 Operations Manager
 Bob Leazer, Park & Trail
 Technician
 Ron Meyers, Park Host
 Therese Cummiskey,
 Naturalist &
 Newsletter Editor

Board Members

Wayne Atwood
 Terri Diers
 Cory Klehm
 Gene Parker
 Kathy Tollenaere

To Contact Us: 🎵

Phone:

641-472-4421



E-mail:

jeffersonccb@lisco.com



Swinging Bridge Fundraiser

If you haven't personally experienced crossing the swinging bridge located within Jefferson County park, chances are your child, grandchild or the child next door has! A big hit with young and old alike, the swinging bridge was installed in 1986 over a shallow ravine on a hilly trail linking the campground with the picnic area.

It has been determined, however, that to continue to provide a safe facility, the bridge must be replaced. The conservation board has approved a fund-raising measure, entitled "Join the Jefferson County Park 'Swingers!'" to help cover the cost of the bridge replacement (approximately \$10,000). Anyone making a \$25 donation will be eligible to receive a t-shirt. All donations will be completely tax-deductible. T-shirts and contribution forms, containing t-shirt size and color preferences, are on display in the Jefferson County Courthouse lobby, the Jefferson County Health Center, and at the Jeff. Co. Park nature center.

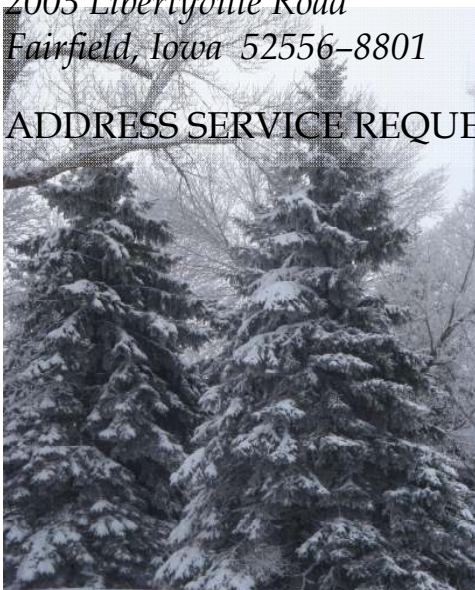


Any interested club or organization desiring more information could request a "program" given by a JCCB representative. Please call Kathy at 472-9479 or Dennis at 472-4421 with your request.

Jefferson County Conservation Board
 2003 Libertyville Road
 Fairfield, Iowa 52556-8801

**Presorted Standard
 U.S. Postage Paid
 Fairfield, IA 52556
 Permit No. 204**

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Enjoy Your County Parks This Winter!